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Size and Quality of the Soviet Merchant Fleet

At the end of 1966 the Soviet merchant fleet included 1,075 dry cargo ships and tankers totalling 9 million deadweight tons. Tankers made up more than one-third of the tonnage. About 50 percent of the total tonnage consisted of ships 5 years old or less; another 30 percent were from 6 to 10 years old. The fleet was seventh largest in the world after Liberia, the United States, Great Britain, Norway, Japan, and Greece, in that order,* and accounted for approximately 4 percent of world tonnage. At the end of 1967 the fleet will include approximately 1,200 ships totalling 9.7 million deadweight tons. By the end of 1970 the fleet should number between 1,400 and 1,500 ships with a total tonnage between 12 and 13 million deadweight. It will then probably rank sixth in the world and will be one of the world's most modern fleets.

Most of the ships added to the Soviet fleet since 1960 are as technically advanced as their counterparts in the Free World; however, partly because the Soviet fleet is used primarily in Soviet trade it is ill-equipped in some respects to compete with Free World fleets on other routes. In line with the typical pattern of Soviet foreign trade, most Soviet dry cargo ships are designed to carry general cargo in one direction and bulk cargo in the other direction. The Soviet fleet lacks large ships specialized as bulk carriers, and specialized general cargo ships designed for low-cost transportation on specific trade routes, such as are found in the more progressive Free World fleets. In addition, draft limitations in Soviet seaports have prevented the USSR from building the very large tankers, which have the lowest operating costs per ton-mile. None of the newest Soviet tankers are larger than 48,000 deadweight tons; tankers of more than 250,000 deadweight tons are being built for certain fleets in the Free World.

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*This ranking is based on tonnage registered by flag. Most of the vessels flying the Liberian flag are owned in other countries.